

'Angels' send messages of hope to those in need

By **CHRIS SHOLLY**
Staff Writer

CAMPBELLTOWN — Cindy Gabner picked up a letter from a pile stacked on her couch. She read a few lines, trying to hold back the tears.

The letters came from across the United States, expressing gratitude for thoughts of hope and caring — and for the crocheted angels, smiley faces and butterflies that accompany those thoughts.

"Many times I open these (thank-you notes) and cry," she said.

Gabner is president of Angels of Hope, a group that crochets angels, smiley faces and butterflies for people in need of hope. A small card is attached to the items explaining what they are and why they were

sent.

The South Londonderry Township woman joined the group in January 2003. At the time, it was a small body of about 50 women around the country.

"I joined originally because I love to crochet first ... and it was just a way to reach out to someone with something that you enjoy doing," Gabner said.

Angels of Hope was started in 2002 with about 15 women. When the founder stepped down, Kelly Smith of Michigan assumed her duties. Because of health problems, Smith asked Gabner to help her. When Smith was unable to continue, Gabner took over.

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Cindy Gabner, president of Angels of Hope, reads a thank-you card in her South Londonderry home.

Angels of Hope send out smiles

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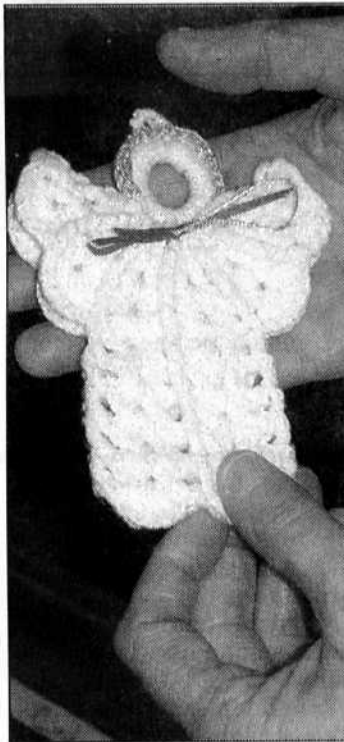
"At that time it was a small group, but the Web site has helped," Gabner said. "It's no longer just members that know of people who need help. Anyone can go to the Web site and request that an angel be sent."

Today, there are 685 members who send between 2,500 and 3,000 angels a month. The members span the globe, including Canada, England, Australia and nearly all of the 50 United States.

Last year, Angels of Hope set a goal to send out 50,000 angels, smiley faces and butterflies, Gabner said. The members exceeded that goal by about 5,000. For 2006, she said, she's confident the group can reach 65,000.

Gabner manages the group from her home on Spring Road, near Mt. Gretna, with the help of board members Kelly Hydrick of Alabama and Mary Ehret Holler of Kansas. They connect via e-mail on a regular basis.

As president, Gabner is often up late at night sifting through requests for angels, assigning requests to various members. She rarely turns down a request.



Chris Sholly / Lebanon Daily News

Angels of Hope crochets angels that it sends to people in need of hope.

The angels are not specific to a particular disease or cause, she added. Angels have gone out to people who are suffering from depression or going through a divorce. Other have been sent to Hurricane Katrina victims. The group is planning to send angels to the families affected by the

recent Sago Mine disaster in West Virginia.

Angels of Hope also sends angels to American families that have a lost a loved one in the Iraq war.

One recipient was Deborah Tainsh of Midland, Ga., whose stepson, Sgt. Patrick Tainsh, was killed in Iraq on Feb. 11, 2004, and who has written a book, "Heart of a Hawk, Eye of the Eagle," chronicling her family's journey toward healing.

In an e-mail interview, Tainsh said the angels were a blessing. At first, the family received a few angels from across the United States, she said.

"When the first ones came in, I placed them on our fireplace mantel around Patrick's photos," she wrote. "Then suddenly we were receiving one or two a day from all across the country. Opening the mailbox and pulling out envelopes that said Angels for Hope brought such a smile onto my husband's and my face. The work and gifts that Angels of Hope have provided is a gift that is immeasurable in words or price."

Tainsh said she and her husband continue to have a special angel-tree set in

FLY TO THE ANGELS:

In April, Angels for Hope was incorporated and, last month, it received its federal designation as a 501(c) nonprofit organization. That allows members and others to take tax deductions for donations and allows the group to hold fund-raisers.

To learn how to become a member, to make a donation or to request an angel, visit the Angels for Hope Web site at www.angels-forhope.org.

their home "to remember those who remembered us. ... These angels of hope have without doubt been a part of our mending."

Gabner has taken angels, smiley faces and butterflies to the Ronald McDonald House in Derry Township. House manager Todd Layser said the items are appreciated.

"We put one in each bedroom, and we have had a very good response," Layser said. "Our guests thank us and have let us know that the angels were appreciated. It's great that other people take the time and energy to do this."